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'American Adventure': A National Family

By Richard L. Coe

Exuberant and passionately confident, "The American Adventure" today begins what could be a generation's run at the new National Heritage Theater, 13th and E Streets, N.W.

This national family scrapbook is a multi-media experience which will be valuable in quickening tourists into an expectant mood for Washington sight-seeing. For local residents it will be a reminder of what their unique city represents.

Two twin theaters have been tucked underneath the

auditorium of the old Warner Theater, an area once known to Washingtonians as the Neptune Room. Both seat 174. Before curved screens 50 feet wide and 12 feet high, Motion Picture projectors and 32 spotlights light a thousand of images during the 90-minute performance.

Director A. Alexander D. Smith's narration, dramatically spoken by TV's William Conrad, is roughly chronological, linking hundreds of history's threads to Washington. The theme is complex but clear: Americans join forces under law for mutual benefit.

Imagery is the overall design. Sometimes, across the screens, as many as 10 different pictures make the eyes dart, while the narration suggests, indirectly, their linkages. Some images are strikingly similar views of the White House. Other images, including forests, ocean waves, masterpieces of nature or engineering, old photographs, portraits, cartoon and newsreels trace the westward sweep of the frontier. A moving incident hews in memory: the linkage of the two courses from East and West, the clank of the Golden Spike.

For once, a misused label,

Scrapbook

multi-media, is justified. The quadraphonic soundtrack — 56 speakers from nine locations — serve the ear, sometimes too shatteringly but often with the subtlety of a football. Technically, images and sound are controlled by an intricate, taped computer system.

Vital to this is the superb, rich, flowing score by Richard Wayne Dirksen, composer in residence at Washington Cathedral. Played by members of the National Symphony, this stirring music could stand on its own as a concert piece or recording.

Ultimately, the accent is dynamic affirmation, a contrast to the prevailing American rash of bitter self-lashing. "The American Adventure" emphasizes the ideal's gradual progression. It is noteworthy that Robert M. Johnson's production has been created and financed entirely by private sources, with no governmental or Bicentennial funds involved. However, the program does detail the government agencies that have been active contributors of stills and films. This, in its own way, is a statement of confidence in the theme's philosophy.

Starting today performances will run continuously from 11 a.m. until 7 p.m., with extended schedules planned for next month. One may book in advance at 600-2030, for sound track translations in French, Spanish, German and Japanese. Admission is \$2.25 for adults and, for children under 12, \$1.25. Besides a quick-food restaurant, the lobby also present exhibits of the White House News Photographers Association and presidential medals from Washington through Ford.

Though Union Station's tourist center remains merely a hole in the ground, 17th and E provides an illuminating stepping-off spot for the capital's sights.

Christian Science Monitor February 3, 1976

Star-spangled knickknacks threaten Bicentennial

By Clayton Jones
Staff correspondent
The Christian Science Monitor

Tacky commercialism is shining the spotlight on America's 200th birthday, and government is powerless to stop it, says U.S. bicentennial chief Joan W. Warner.

"Commercialism could be the Achilles heel that brings down the bicentennial," says Mr. Warner, head of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA).

A flood of star-spangled knickknacks are being sold to Americans on the eve of the nation's anniversary — plastic liberty bells made in Japan; "Spirit of '76" pens; and red, white, and blue teddy bears — all in violation of the Declaration of Independence.

The issue of commercialism troubles Mr. Warner, who says the problem shows how America's free-enterprise system works.

"We're called on to stop it, but the government can't stop merchants from selling tacky stuff off their shelves," Mr. Warner said in a recent interview. "If this is the free-style of America, then the government should not change it."

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